



SIERRA LEONE

DHAPP

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HIV/AIDS
PREVENTION PROGRAM

REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS
AMONG UNIFORMED PERSONNEL IN
SELECTED AFRICAN NATIONS AND
BEYOND

WINNING BATTLES IN THE WAR AGAINST HIV/AIDS

BACKGROUND

Country Statistics

The estimated population of Sierra Leone is 6.3 million people, with an average life expectancy of 41 years. English is the official language of Sierra Leone, which has an estimated literacy rate of 35%, unevenly distributed between men and women. The government is slowly reestablishing its authority after the 1991 to 2002 civil war. Sierra Leone is an extremely poor nation with tremendous inequality in income distribution. While it possesses substantial mineral, agricultural, and fishery resources, its physical and social infrastructure is not well developed, and serious social disorders continue to hamper economic development. Nearly half of the working-age population engages in subsistence agriculture. The GDP per capita is \$700. About two thirds of the working-age population engages in subsistence agriculture. The fate of the economy depends on the maintenance of domestic peace and the continued receipt of substantial aid from abroad, which is essential to offset the severe trade imbalance and supplement government revenues. Alluvial diamond mining remains the major source of hard currency earnings, accounting for nearly half of Sierra Leone's exports.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in Sierra Leone's general population is estimated at 1.7%, with approximately 51,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Prevalence rates are thought to be higher in urban than in rural areas. Identified significant risk factors include high-risk heterosexual contact and contact with commercial sex workers.

Military Statistics

The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) consists of approximately

10,500 active-duty members. Sierra Leone expends 2.3% of the GDP on military purposes. The RSLAF undertook a seroprevalence and behavioral study of its troops in 2007. The findings from the study revealed a prevalence rate of 3.29%, twice that of the general population.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

The RSLAF HIV/AIDS program began in spring 2002. It is a collaborative effort between DHAPP, the DAO at the US Embassy, and the RSLAF. The relationship has fostered many advances in this program. With support from DHAPP, the RSLAF has developed a workplace policy on HIV/AIDS for its personnel. This policy is geared toward creating a working environment free of discrimination and ensuring that all service personnel are aware of the policy. In 2008, the RSLAF continued reviewing its current HIV policy with the intention of revising it.



Foreign Military Financing Assistance

Sierra Leone was awarded Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funding for the acquisition of laboratory equipment, and supporting reagents and supplies related to the diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. This award was appropriated for fiscal years 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2007. Funding for 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2007 was released for expenditure during FY05, FY07, FY08, and FY09, respectively. To date, 2003 funding has been used to procure HIV test kits, hepatitis B rapid test

kits, generators, and a dry hematology analyzer. FY04 funds have been used to procure HIV test kits, a microplate reader and washer, 2 CD4 counters, and rapid

test kits, in addition to other supporting diagnostic supplies and reagents. Procurement using FY06 and FY07 funds is still in negotiation.

OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Prevention

In FY08, 15,415 troops and family members were reached with comprehensive prevention messages, and 278 were trained in the provision of those messages. Another prevention achievement has been having peer educators bring their spouses to their trainings, which emphasizes the importance of partner HIV knowledge. The RSLAF supported 28 condom service outlets. In FY08, DHAPP procured a program vehicle to attend prevention trainings as well as monitor and evaluate the current program activities that are occurring outside of Freetown.

Ten (10) RSLAF laboratory technicians were retrained in blood safety during July 2008. Also in FY08, 260 military medical personnel were trained in injection safety. There was a decrease in the number of service outlets that provide PMTCT services for pregnant women. During the year, only 1 service outlet supported PMTCT services, and 41 pregnant women were provided services at this outlet, 12 of whom were provided with a complete course of ART prophylaxis. Sixteen (16) medical providers were trained in the provision of PMTCT services.

Care

One (1) service outlet provides HIV-related palliative care for RSLAF members and their families. During the year, 271 troops and dependents were provided with HIV-related palliative care services. Two (2) outlets provided CT services for military members, and 1,774 troops were tested for HIV and received their results. Another 60 were trained in October 2008 in the provision of CT. In FY08, DHAPP collaborated with the RSLAF and the Zambian Police Superintendent on a 1-month sensitization tour on fighting stigma and discrimination and promoting HIV testing in all RSLAF brigades and battalions in Freetown. The result was encouraging: a total of 756 military personnel, including officers, other ranks, and dependents, were tested during the tour.

Treatment

One (1) service outlet provides ART for RSLAF members, family, and civilians in the area. During the year, 42 RSLAF troops or family members were established on ART. Four (4) providers were trained in the provision of ART and 2 of them attended *MIHTP* in San Diego. Ten (10) laboratory technicians were trained in ART services. An HIV/AIDS laboratory was constructed and opened at 5th Brigade Headquarters at Gondama, Bo, in August 2007, so DHAPP worked during FY08 on procuring lab equipment for the new lab using FMF funding.

Other

In June 2008, the RSLAF held a 3-day policy review workshop that included reviewing the National HIV/AIDS Policy of Sierra Leone. Revisions of the policy are under way. Thirty (30) senior-level officers were trained in reducing stigma and discrimination.

Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal for FY09 activities from the DAO at the US Embassy on behalf of the RSLAF. Specific objectives of the proposal included (1) increasing prevention efforts for troops, family members, and civilians in the surrounding areas; (2) introducing a *Prevention with Positives* program; (3) increasing CT testing abilities for the RSLAF; and (4) training additional health care providers in PMTCT services, laboratory diagnostics, and ART services. DHAPP received from POSHE, a local NGO, a proposal with the objective of providing training for the chaplains and other religious leaders in the RSLAF on stigma and discrimination.

